



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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With Investment from OPIC, U.S.-Owned Business Improving Harvests in Rwanda



Workers at the Jones' company in Rwanda begin planting new, virus-free banana plant seedlings. These seedlings seek to help farmers boost farm production yields, incomes and the local food supply.

Steven Jones, a horticulture wholesaler and retailer from Tennessee, witnessed widespread food insecurity years ago during a visit to Africa sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Visiting the continent on a trade mission to learn more about farming techniques in the region, he saw firsthand how deficient seed and plant stocks were hindering food production and impairing the health and nutrition of communities depending on locally produced food. Without good quality agricultural inputs, farmers were spending large amounts of time and energy tending crops while yields remained poor in quantity and quality.

In Rwanda, the use of diseased plants and old seedlings has contributed to a serious decline in the country's production of pyrethrum, a plant used as a natural insecticide. The local production of pyrethrum in Rwanda today amounts to roughly one quarter of what it was 30 years ago.

Other Rwandan food staples, such as bananas and pineapples, have also suffered in recent decades. This declining supply of food staples limits the growth of Rwanda's export market and contributes to food insecurity for many families. The United Nations World Food Program estimates that over 50 percent of children in Rwanda are chronically malnourished and one child in four is underweight.

Jones and his wife, Cheryl, knew they had an opportunity to help Rwandan farmers improve their crop yields and contribute to growth in the agriculture sector. With experience in plant propagation and many contacts in the plant industry, the Joneses set out to develop a Rwanda-based business that would grow virus-free plant cultures and provide advice on plant care and improved agronomy practices to farmers.

In order to help fund his large startup costs, Steven submitted a business proposal to the [Overseas Private Investment Corporation](#) (OPIC), the U.S. Government's development finance institution. As part of Feed the Future's whole-of-government effort to leverage U.S. Government resources to increase investment in agriculture, OPIC looks to help solve critical development challenges such as food insecurity by mobilizing private capital to U.S. businesses. In 2010, Jones was approved for a \$2 million loan for his small business, [Forestry and Agricultural Investment Management](#) (pdf).

Since then, the company has grown to employ 15 staff members, and is cultivating healthy plants that show promise of improving food yields for local farmers. The Jones' farm operates demonstration plots, where Rwandan farmers can learn how to boost productivity and crop health. The virus-free banana demonstration plots grown by the Joneses have the potential to

produce ten times more per hectare than similar crops in Rwanda.

Steven hopes that the improved plants he is growing and the cultivation techniques he is sharing with the community will not only help farmers increase their incomes, but also produce more food locally and potentially help reduce rates of undernutrition. He also hopes that Rwandan juice and canning companies can look forward to using pineapple and passion fruit produced by local Rwandan farmers, instead of importing across borders.

This story originally [appeared](#) on the OPIC Blog. [Learn more](#) about how OPIC is helping transform agricultural development through innovative finance and investment solutions.